



The Bonds that Connect Us by TheGirlWhoLikesTooMuchStuff2.0

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Humor, Supernatural

Language: English

Characters: Billy H., Max M., Steve H.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-07-08 12:54:50

Updated: 2019-09-13 14:58:56

Packaged: 2019-12-12 17:32:46

Rating: T

Chapters: 6

Words: 20,952

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: "Harrington?" Billy asked, sounding a little on edge. "What the hell was that?" "If you won't leave," Steve called over his shoulder, "then get on the damn bus!" At that moment Lucas cried from the top of the bus, "Steve, look out! Look out!" AU where a Mr. Billy Hargrove has more to do in the back half of Season 2.

1. Chapter One

Disclaimer: I own nothing. Stranger Things and all characters belong to Netflix and the Duffer brothers. This story is based on Stranger Things season 2 (and maybe season 3) and this story is made for entertainment purposes only.

Author's Note: So...I have been a fan of Stranger Things for a while now. And by fan I mean I love it. I don't have Netflix (because I live in the stone ages) but I have been able to watch season 1 and 2 because I bought the Target exclusive DVD/Blu-Ray box sets. Now, I know all about season 3 and what happens to a certain Billy Hargrove and let me tell you, I'm mad about it. So, I was thinking of how I could fix this via fanfiction. And that's where this story comes into play.

My thinking is that if Billy was a part of the party then if something bad were to happen to him, like I don't know he gets possessed or something, then maybe his story wouldn't end the way it did. So, we begin on season 2 episode 6, in which I give Billy a bigger role to play in the back half of season 2.

The idea is that Billy's dad and step-mother come home on time and see Max missing and send Billy looking for her. Them being on time means that when Billy does find Max with Steve and the kids, they're at the junkyard ready to fight off those Demo-dogs. So...he's actually part of the main story and fun ensues. Based heavily on a YouTube video I saw. (In Defense of Billy from Stranger Things S2 by xForts)

(And to my Redemption for the Blue Hearts fans, don't worry I haven't forgotten that story. I will still be writing for it, I just wanted to write this thing while it was fresh on my mind.)

Anyways, onto the story!

|||||
|||||

The Bonds that Connect Us

Chapter One: The Charmer

"Hey, guys, we're home." That was Susan. Well, look who decided to be on time for once. It was getting dark and Billy was beginning to think that Susan and his father were going to be late again. Not that it mattered to him. Let them be late, he was better off on his own anyways.

He didn't answer her, too busy checking himself out in his mirror. He had a hot date tonight and maybe, he'd get lucky. One could only hope. He lit up a cigarette and grabbed his hair spray. He sprayed a curl of hair that seemed to have lost its body. He was in the middle fixing the curl to lay perfectly on his forehead when Susan knocked on his door. "Billy?"

He glanced away from his reflection to his closed door that was covered with posters of sexy girls. "Yeah, I'm a little bit busy in here, Susan."

He turned back to his reflection. Then his dad spoke. "Open the door. *Right now.*"

Billy froze. His dad had that tone to his voice again. That tone that scared the shit out of him. But he shook his head and took a long drag of his cigarette letting it calm him down. What could his dad possibly be mad at him for? He hadn't done anything.

Regardless of this fact, he felt a pang of anxiety as he walked up to his door and opened it. Standing on the other side of his door was a concerned looking Susan and his dad with his lips in a thin line. That always meant he was pissed off.

Jesus Christ, what did I do to piss him off already?

They literally got home two seconds ago and he already looked about ready to break his jaw. That's why he asked, "What's wrong?"

"Why don't you tell us?" his dad responded.

God, why couldn't he just spit out what his problem was instead of playing this damn game. "Because I don't know."

"We can't find Maxine," Susan said.

"And her window's open," his dad added. Billy glanced away from his dad's hard glare. *Shit*. The little bitch just didn't wanna listen to him. "Where is she?"

"I don't know," he muttered under his breath, still avoiding his dad's glare.

His dad scoffed at this. "You don't know?"

"Look, I'm sure she just, I don't know, went to the arcade or something." He walked away from his father and step-mother to grab his brown leather coat from his closet. "I'm sure she's fine."

He heard his dad follow him into his room. "You were supposed to watch her."

Billy sighed, "I know, dad. I was. But, you know, I have a life too and I have a date." He pulled on his jacket and turned around. His dad was closer to him then what he had thought. He didn't like this at all. "I'm sorry, okay?"

His dad had his arms crossed as he scoffed again. "I see, so that's why you've been staring at yourself in the mirror like some faggot instead of watching your sister?"

Why wasn't he listening to me?

"I have been looking after her all week, dad. Okay?" Billy wasn't sure what came over him, but apparently he was going to try his luck tonight. He raised his voice. "If she wants to run off, then that's her problem, all right? She's thirteen years old. She shouldn't need a full-time babysitter." He should just stop right now. Apologize for raising his voice, apologize twenty times for not looking after Max, but dammit, he shouldn't feel guilty. "And she's not my sister!"

And that's what set his dad off.

Billy had no time to react before his father was pushing him against the built in shelf next to his closet. He had gone too far. Pushed his dad too far. That anxious feeling in the pit of his stomach exploded into full on dread. His dad held himself to his full height and despite that fact that Billy was about an inch taller than him, he still felt so

small.

"What did we talk about?" his dad whispered before slapping him upside the face. He could feel the red mark starting already, though he doubted it would leave a bruise. His dad was careful like that. To hurt him enough to scare him but not to leave any evidence. Billy clenched his fists, his anger building up only second to his fear. His dad grabbed his chin and turned him to face him. "What did we talk about?"

Billy couldn't help the tears that suddenly sprang up in his eyes. "Respect and responsibility."

"That is right. Now, apologize to Susan."

Billy never looked away from his dad's flaring eyes as he said, "I'm sorry, Susan."

Susan shook her head, looking like she was caught in the middle again. "It's okay, Neil, really-"

"No, it's not okay," his dad interrupted, pointing a finger at his son. "Nothing about his behavior is okay. But he's gonna make up for it." His dad let go of him and started to head back towards Susan who hadn't left the doorway. "He's gonna call whatever whore he's seeing tonight and cancel their date. And then he's gonna go find his sister. Like the good, kind, respecting brother that he is." He turned on his heels and faced Billy straight on. "Isn't that right, Billy?"

Billy just stared at him, trying to make sure the tears didn't fall over the brim.

"Isn't that right?!" his dad screamed in his face.

Don't cry.

"Yes, sir," he said just above a whisper.

His dad sighed, "I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you."

Don't cry. Do not cry.

He spoke louder this time. "Yes, sir."

"Find Max." The "or else" was very heavily implied. His stern dad and a shaken up Susan both left him alone then. Susan had the good enough courtesy to close his door behind her. Billy closed his eyes, telling himself it was over and that it wasn't too bad. He had been through a lot worse. This was nothing to feel hopeless about.

He would find Max, probably with Sinclair, knock a few heads, come home, and then everything would be fine.

He was kidding himself.

The two seconds after he had closed his eyes, those tears streamed down his face. He slammed his hand against the shelf and wanted to scream out nothing but curse words and how much he hated his father. And the little bitch that was causing him so much trouble. He ran his hands through his hair and sank down to the floor. God, he hated how he could be reduced to nothing more than a sniveling mess after a few words and a slap from his father.

Maybe dad's right...Maybe I am worthless crybaby.

He cursed himself for even considering *him* of all people to be right.

He wiped his face and took in a shaky breath.

Find Max. That's all he had to do. Find Max and beat the living shit out of her.

...

His first stop was of course Lucas Sinclair's house but he had no luck finding Max there. According to Mrs. Sinclair, Lucas and his dork friends all hung out at the Wheeler home. So, that was his next stop. The Wheeler home as well as the Sinclair home were both large, two story suburban houses. White trim, perfectly cut grass, sprinkler system, the whole cliché.

He missed California so much. They had suburbs, sure, but they weren't this sickently picture perfect. What he wouldn't give for a flaw in this backwater, American dream, hellhole. California had an edge

to it. You could be anybody and become anything. What was so God damn great about Indiana? They were close to Chicago?

The thought of running away to the metropolitan city crossed his mind a hundred times a week and yet, here he was. He would never admit it but the reason he didn't run away was because he was sure that his father would run after him. And not in the loving, don't leave, you're too young to be on your own, please come back home way. But the, if you ever make me have to do this again, boy, you're dead way.

He rang the doorbell about a thousand times until he finally heard a woman shout, "I'm coming!" About damn time, but he couldn't be all rude and act like a total asshole if he wanted information.

It was time to turn on the charm.

A brunette woman with her hair pulled up, wearing a violet bathrobe opened the door. It was a slightly revealing bathrobe. Billy eyed the woman and if he had to guess, he would say she was Nancy Wheeler's mother. "Oh. Hi," he said.

"Hi," the woman said, clearly staring at his bare chest through his unbuttoned shirt.

She must have realized that she was in fact staring, because she shook her head quickly and met his eyes. He chuckled and said softly, "I, uh, didn't realize Nancy had a sister." The woman chuckled and started to blush. "What's so funny?"

"I'm Nancy's mother."

Called it.

"No," he said in fake surprise.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Wheeler." He eyed her up and down, and honestly, she wasn't half bad.

Mrs. Wheeler shook her head again and stammered out, "U-um, I'm

sorry, and you are?"

"Billy. Billy Hargrove." He gently took her hand into his.

"You must be here for Nancy."

"Nancy? No, no, no. Not my type."

She's a bit of a priss.

"No, actually, I am looking for my little sister," God how he hated saying that word, "Max. Goes by Maxine. She's been missing all day, and now it's starting to get dark, and, uh, to be honest with you, I've been worried sick, you know, so..."

"Oh," Mrs. Wheeler said in sympathy. Well, she bought his act.

"I thought she was at Lucas' but Mrs. Sinclair said your house is the designated hangout so...here I am."

Mrs. Wheeler parted her lips and eyed him with a gleam in her eye that he recognized. He should have been a little weirded out that a forty year-old married woman with two kids wanted him, but what could he say? He liked the fact that he wasn't totally worthless to the entire population. What his family couldn't give him, his many dates could. And even if they couldn't, he could lose himself in the thought of happiness for a while.

"Well," Mrs. Wheeler started after wetting her lips, "the kids aren't here. I only know two places they could be at. And that's the Byer's house or the junkyard."

The junkyard? Of course, where else would a bunch of shitheads wanna go?

Billy smiled causally. "Do you mind giving directions? I'm still kinda new in town and I don't know all of the Hawkins landmarks...like the junkyard."

Mrs. Wheeler chuckled. "Oh, of course. Come in, come in." He stepped in and glanced around the well put together home. Mrs. Wheeler shut the front door and motioned for him to follow her into

the kitchen. "Don't find my husband, he's just sleeping." He saw a plump middle aged man with glasses, sitting in a La-Z-Boy, snoring. Mrs. Wheeler was quick to write down directions to the Byer home and to the junkyard. She tore the piece of paper she had wrote on from the pad and handed it to him. "It can get pretty dark at night so, drive slowly."

Billy smiled, taking the directions from her. "Always."

"And when you see Mike, tell him to come home already, okay?"

He nodded his head that he would, knowing full well that he wouldn't. "You're a real lifesaver, you know that?" He wasn't lying. His dad would kill him if he didn't find Max.

Mrs. Wheeler shrugged. "Anytime."

"See you around." And with that, he left the Wheeler's too pretty of a house and got in his car. With directions in hand, he started his engine, and drove to the Byer's place. He was pleased with himself actually. He charmed that Mrs. Wheeler pretty good. He could be quite the charmer when he wanted to be.

Billy just wished he could charm his way out of his horrible father's abuse.

...

Five minutes after banging on the Byer's door, he resolved that no one was home. That meant he had one more place to search; the junkyard. Great. He was really looking forward to that. *Not*. He swore to whatever greater power was out there that he would kill that little brat Max for this and those stupid kids too. Well, kill was too strong a word. They would be hurting though, he was positive of that much.

As he drove to the junkyard, he couldn't help but think about his dad at their new home waiting for him. Someday it would all change. Someday Billy wouldn't be afraid of his old man, the bastard. Someday he would feel like he had control over his own destiny.

Billy had no way of knowing that going to the junkyard of all places at that time, on this night, would end up changing his life forever.

Author's Note Again: So, what did you think? Good, bad, something in between? Feedback is always appreciated but no haters, okay? Anyways, thanks for reading and hopefully you check out Chapter Two! See you around!

2. Chapter Two

Chapter Two: The Heebie-Jeebies

Steve couldn't help but reflect over the last few hours of his life. Somehow, he had been pulled into a situation where he was preparing a trap for a miniature "Demogorgon" in the middle of a dark and rusting junkyard. He had just wanted to apologize to Nancy. But, nope. Apparently not. Apparently he had become the designated babysitter for Dustin, Lucas, and that new girl Maxine. And God forbid if you actually call her Maxine. She would only answer to Max.

After about an eternity of waiting the damn little monster dog finally showed up, through the fog. But nothing could ever be easy. The stupid thing wasn't taking the bait, which was a pile of hamburger dowsed in gasoline. Then it hit him why it wasn't taking the bait; all it ate the entire time if it followed the trail they had left behind was cow. They needed to expand the menu.

Steve stood up and picked up his wooden bat with the nails. "Steve? Steve, what are you doing?" Dustin asked from behind him, sounding worried. He turned and saw that the middle schooler looked as worried as he sounded. He threw the lighter to Dustin who caught it.

"Just be ready."

Steve knew he was crazy. He absolutely knew it but...to hell with it. They needed to kill this thing, here and now. He stepped out of the bus, scanning the misty junkyard. At night, your eyes could play tricks on you and the fact that he was about to take on a beast from another dimension didn't help with that.

He heard the bus door shut behind him and the little monster dog growl ahead of him. He swirled the bat around and started to whistle for it. "Come on, buddy. Human tastes better than cat. I can promise you that." Why was he talking to it? The mist began to blow away in areas and then he could finally see it. It looked like a mutated dog with the faceless head of that monster he had helped fight last year.

That thing with its face that opened up revealing all of its sharp,

killer teeth... It was no wonder he still had nightmares about it from time to time.

The monster dog seemed to stare at him, amazing feat since it had no eyes to stare out of. It was only a matter of seconds before-

"Am I dreaming, or is that you, Harrington?"

Steve spun to his right where the voice had come from. He knew that voice, he that-oh, no. Billy Hargrove. As if on cue, Hargrove came strolling through the fog, lit cigarette hanging from his mouth, causal look on his face.

What the hell was he doing here? And now of all times?

When Hargrove was about three feet away from Steve he stopped and asked, "What are you doing here, amigo? And talking to yourself no less?"

"Could ask you the same thing," he said, barely taking his eyes off the dog, who mercifully, hadn't moved.

"Like the bat," Hargrove said, pointing to the bat he clenched in his hands. "Very do it yourself. Do you expect to see your ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend tonight? Gonna smash in his head, pretty boy?"

Steve wouldn't have been in the mood for this any time, but considering that their lives were currently on the line...Yeah, no. He wasn't dealing with this shit right now. "You need to leave," he said firmly.

Hargrove ignored him and took in his surrounding, but somehow managed to miss the monster dog standing ten feet away from them. "Not till I find my stepsister. Little birdie told me I could find her here."

"I don't know her. Are we done here?"

"Small? Redhead? Bit of a bitch."

"Doesn't ring a bell," Steve snapped. "Now *leave*."

Hargrove scoffed and shook his head. Steve's impatience and anxiety was growing by the second. He was continuously glancing between the dog and Hargrove making sure neither of them stepped any closer. "You know, I don't know, this whole situation, Harrington...it's giving me the heebie-jeebies. Cuz, my thirteen-year-old sister goes missing for most of the day, then I find her with you in the middle of an abandoned junkyard, and you lie to me about it."

Steve tightened his hold on the bat. "I don't know what you don't understand about what I just said. She's not here."

"Then who is that?" Hargrove said pointing to the top of the bus, where Max and Lucas were.

Well, son of a...

"Oh, shit," Steve muttered as he saw the two kids duck down too late. He turned back to Hargrove but before he knew it, he was being shoved down to the ground.

Hargrove hovered over him. "I told you to plant your feet." He then preceded to kick him in the stomach. Steve groaned in pain and saw that Hargrove was marching up to the bus, looking more than a little pissed off.

Oh, come on!

He was quick to get to his feet, pick up the bat, and run up to Hargrove so that he could pull him back away from the bus. He almost enjoyed the look of surprise on Hargrove's face but then he remembered that he couldn't get sucked up into high school feuds, not when actual lives were at stake. "Hargrove! You need to listen to me right now! You need to leave! It's a matter of life or death!"

"Wha'cha ya gonna do, Harrington?" Hargrove said, raising his arms out in a, come and get me, pose. "Scare me with your nail bat? Because believe me, you are gonna have to do a lot more than that to scare me off."

Steve was pissed off and scared and fed up with this guy from California who apparently didn't know how to button his shirt. So he

shoved him against the bus. Hargrove rubbed the back of his neck and started laughing. Jesus, this guy was crazy. "So, you do have some fight in you after all, huh? I've been waiting to meet this King Steve I've heard so much about!"

Steve didn't get a chance to say anything because the little monster dog let out a terrifying sound. It was a mixture of a shriek and growl. Shit, shit, shit... He quickly retraced his steps and saw that the dog still hadn't moved, maybe a step or two, but otherwise nothing. He cursed himself for being stupid enough to let Hargrove of all people distract him. The guy was a total ass hat.

"Harrington?" ass hat in question asked, sounding a little on edge. "What the hell was that?"

"If you won't leave," he called over his shoulder, "then get on the damn bus!"

At that moment Lucas cried from the top of the bus, "Steve, look out! Look out!"

"I'm a little busy right now!"

"Three o'clock! Three o'clock!" the boy shouted.

Steve glanced over his shoulder and saw at least four more of these miniature monsters coming from out of the fog. Oh, shit, shit, shit... Dustin had opened the bus door and was screaming, "Abort! Abort!" Upon seeing that he was slowly being surrounded, he didn't have to be told twice.

Steve started to run.

3. Chapter Three

Chapter Three: Scary Hair

Harrington was running towards him and it took Billy a moment to realize why. There were all of these dogs surrounding them, snarling and howling. They were on the ground and up on top of the rotting, abandoned cars. Dogs...yeah, that's what they were. But they looked like they didn't have a...they had to be dogs. His eyes were obviously just playing tricks on him. All dogs had *faces*. He was just being stupid.

The second Harrington freaked out and ran, about four dogs lunged forward. Billy found himself hurriedly backing up. That kid with the curly hair and the baseball cap kept on screaming, "Abort! Abort!" Which was getting annoying to say the least. A dog lunged for Harrington but he rolled over the hood of a red car without a windshield. The dog crashed into the car and Harrington was quick to get to his feet. He swung his DIY baseball bat with the nails and smacked another dog that had jumped for him.

Then he was running back to the bus, screaming at Billy, "Move! Move! Get on the bus!"

You don't have to tell me twice.

Billy shoved the three kids to the side of the stairwell. How the hell did they expect anyone to get on this damn bus if they were crowding the only entrance? Stupid kids. He turned to see Harrington running for his life as three dogs chased him. But he jumped inside and the curly hair kid slammed the bus door shut just as the dogs slammed into the door.

The whole bus shook.

The dogs kept ramming into the door and Billy had little to no faith that this broken down husk of a bus would have adequate doors that would protect them from a pack of wild dogs. "Are they rabid or something?" Max asked, sounding scared.

Max.

Billy turned to his step-sister and glared her down. With the fear of these random ass dogs and the adrenaline rush of sprinting onto the bus, he had nearly forgot the reason why he was here. Nearly. The hatred rose up in him and all he wanted to do was-

The bus shook violently. So much so that Billy almost lost his footing. Harrington had grabbed a spare sheet of what looked like metal and put it up against the door as a reinforcement. He couldn't kill Max and her friends if he died so he helped him keep the metal in place. "Everyone get to the back of the bus!" Harrington shouted.

Max, Sinclair, and curly hair all ran to the back as they were told. "What good is that going to do?" Billy hollered. Before Harrington could answer him, a dog had broken part way through their make-shift barrier. Its paws with its long sharp claws stuck through. It screeched an ungodly sound. Billy saw the bat with the nails a foot away from him and hurried to grab it, stand up, and ready himself to bash this thing's head in.

The dog broke in the rest of the way and Billy swung the bat down hard. The little creature made a whimpering sound but he didn't stop until it wasn't making any sounds. He let out a deep breath as he looked at the dog in a pool of blood and he realized...his eyes *hadn't* been playing tricks on him.

"Holy shit...what-what the hell...?" It didn't look right. It looked burnt or mutated or...something grotesque. And it didn't have a face. Just flaps that revealed its mouth, which had like a thousand teeth. "Harrington, what the hell is-?"

Max let out an ear piercing scream. Billy and Harrington both spun around. She and the two boys were staring up at the skylight in the roof. Harrington tore the bat from his clutches and ran to get between the kids and the skylight. "Out of the way! Out of the way!"

Billy could not move. He was in too much shock. Because literally none of this shit made any sense. Harrington was preparing to fight off some more of these...these...*things* when a thundering chorus of howls was sounded off. Then the bus shook again but not as

violently. And then the growling got more and more distant.

It was quiet.

Everyone on the bus was quiet too apart from their scared panting. Harrington slowly made his way to the front of the bus again, Billy got out of his way. He opened the door and had the bat at the ready. Billy was close on his heels, the three kids were close behind him.

"What...happened?" Sinclair asked.

"Steve scared 'em off?" curly hair asked.

Billy couldn't help but scoff. He was tired, afraid, and totally and completely confused but that didn't stop him from quipping, "The only thing scary about Harrington is his hair."

"No way I scared them off," Harrington muttered, turning back to Billy and the kids. "They're going somewhere."

Billy took in a deep breath. The smell was a combination of grease, gasoline, and raw meat. The shock was starting to wear off and now all he had was questions and contempt. "Great. And what the hell were they?"

He did not get an answer.

4. Chapter Four

Chapter Four: Billy the Blunt

"Okay, let me get this straight," Billy said, his voice loud and annoyed. "There was a slug-"

"Pollywog," curly hair interrupted.

Billy glared deep into his eyes. "Don't ever interrupt me again." The boy started fidgeting anxiously. Good, serves him right. "Anyway, there was this thing that grew into a...hell hound, essentially, and you wanted to kill it." He turned and looked directly at Harrington. "So you left a trail of meat to lead to this spot but you left your car near the railroad tracks, because...logic?"

Harrington rolled his eyes. "Dustin and I started the trail on the railroad tracks near his home so why would I need my car *here*?"

"Because a bunch of damn monster dogs were just trying to kill us and we might have needed a way out of here, you asshole!"

Harrington shook his head and pointed at him. "And what about your car? If you were so concerned with having a fast escape why didn't you just run to your car?"

"Because I parked my car about a half mile from here and walked."

"Because...logic?"

"Because there was no way in hell I was parking my car among these disregarded, rusting pieces of shit!"

Harrington sighed and turned away. He started walking away from him and he called to the kids, "Come on, guys. I gotta go get my car and I'm tired of this idiot."

Billy let out a shaky breath. This was insanity. It was. Completely insane. After several attempts at trying to get an explanation to all of this, Harrington and three kids finally broke down and told him a few things. He was having trouble believing what little they told him and

he was a little pissed off that they were hiding the whole story from him, because it was obvious that there was more to tell. He'd probably have trouble believing the rest of the story though. He was having trouble believing what his own two eyes had seen and were seeing. But every few seconds he turned back to the bus and saw the dead creature in the stairwell.

Harrington and the three kids started to all leave together. He was glad, he was tired of this spooky place anyway. "Yeah, okay." He marched up behind Max and grabbed her by the arm. He yanked her from the group. Her big eyes stared up at him in fear. "We're going home and leaving this shit show."

"Let go of me, Billy!" she snapped in that sassy tone of hers. God how he hated it.

Sinclair and the curly haired boy, Dustin, both leaped forward. "Take your hands off of her!" Sinclair shouted.

"And you," he said in a low voice, glaring down at the boy, "stay away from Max. Got it?"

"No I don't got it, dickhead."

You have to admire Sinclair's guts.

"Alright," Harrington said, taking command. "Everyone just calm down. Hargrove, if Max wants to come with us, then she comes with us."

Billy scoffed, "This is a family matter, Harrington, and this does not concern you."

"Oh, yeah?" Harrington raised his eyebrows and planted his hands on his hips. "Well, this whole thing is a life or death matter. She, and in fact yourself, would be safer coming along with us."

Sinclair and Dustin slowly turned to Harrington, both had a, what the hell, look on their faces. Harrington was basically offering to let Billy tag along with the group and clearly neither boy was happy with this. And Billy just scoffed. "I'm going to be safer with you guys? Really?"

"Alright, let's put it this way," Harrington took a step closer to him, "either you come with us, or you go home. Regardless of your decision, Max stays with us. And man, if you make me have to repeat myself again, I will knock you upside the head with my bat."

Something a little unhinged shinned in Harrington's eyes. It was probably just the stress from their near deaths, but in that moment, Billy believed he would do it. And as fun as it would be to finally see how well this guy fought, he was no one near being in his right mind. He wasn't about to take on a challenge when he wasn't ready for it. He begrudgingly let go of Max. She ran back to Sinclair and Dustin who both greeted her warmly. "Okay." He pulled out another cigarette and put it between his lips. He had lost the one he had had earlier because of the whole running for his life thing. "I'll go with you shitheads, but only cuz I need to make sure I get Max back home whenever King Steve deems it time."

Harrington shook his head, a judging and fed up look in his eye. "Yeah, whatever. Let's go." And so, the five left the misty junkyard together and headed for the railroad tracks.

...

The railroad ran through the dark, shadowy woods. There was no fog but it was still so damn difficult to see. Guess Mrs. Wheeler had been right. Harrington and Dustin lead the way, as they were the only ones who knew exactly where Harrington's oh so important car was. Max and Sinclair were side-by-side behind them and Billy was last. He hated the fact that he felt like he had to check behind him every damn second.

The creatures from hell were gone now. No need to worry. All he could do to smother his anxiety was light up his cigarette and enjoy the smooth smoke that entered his lungs.

Dustin glanced over his shoulder with a disgusted look on his face. "Do you have to smoke? I really hate the smell."

"Well, I really hate all of you and you don't see me complaining, do you?"

Harrington whispered to curly hair, "Just ignore him."

"Whose fault is it that he's here, Steve?" Dustin snapped.

"Oh, I know this one," Billy started, "Who is Maxine Mayfield?" Max sent him a smoldering glare over her shoulder. He chuckled as he took in a long drag.

Sinclair threw his hands in the air. "Why is no one addressing the elephant in the room? Forget about the junkyard, forget about Max's brother-"

"I'm not her brother," Billy corrected.

Sinclair ignored him. He hated being ignored. "How did Dustin know that that dog was Dart?"

"I told you," Dustin said sternly. "He had the same yellow pattern on his butt. The bigger issue is that he already molted three times, growing larger every time. The next time he molts, he'll be fully grown, or close to it. And so will his friends."

"Yeah," Harrington added. "And he's gonna eat a lot more than just cats."

Sinclair screeched to a halt and spun Dustin around. "A cat?! Dart ate a cat?"

Dustin stumbled over his words, clearly trying to rebuke what Harrington had said. "N-no, what? No."

Harrington just stared at the kid. "What are you talking about? He ate Mews."

Mews? What a lousy cat name.

"Who's Mews?" Max asked.

"Why is any of this relevant?" Billy muttered to himself.

Harrington ignored him again and answered Max's question. "Mews was Dustin's cat."

"Steve!" Dustin shouted.

"I knew it! You kept him!" Sinclair shouted back.

And then who even cared. They were jabbering about shit that Billy had no stake in nor interest in. Something about breaking the rule of law, blah, blah, blah, and telling Max the truth, blah, blah, blah... Why the hell did people have children? Two minutes with these brats and he already had a migraine. He wasn't listening at all until he heard Dustin say, "I didn't know he was a Demogorgon, okay?"

Billy started. "Whoa, hang on." He gained the boys' attention and he shook his head. "Demogorgon? Like the two headed monster from D and D? That Demogorgon?" Dustin nodded his head dumbfounded and Sinclair just looked confused.

"You know Dungeons and Dragons?" Dustin asked, almost excitedly.

Before Billy could potentially answer, Harrington called, "Guys, do you hear that?" He had walked slightly away from the tracks and was facing the tree line. Everyone shut up for a second to listen, getting ready to run if necessary. There was a faint and distant sound echoing through the trees. It sounded like those dogs howling.

Harrington, Sinclair, and Dustin took off running, just not in the direction Billy had expected. They started running *towards* the sound.

Well, they're going to die. Idiots always do go first. Natural selection at its finest.

Max stared at them like they were crazy. Oh, good. He wasn't the only one to think so. She took a step forward, off of the tracks and shouted, "Why are you guys running towards the-oh, the hell with it!" Then she started running after them too.

Billy shook his head. There was no reason he should go after them. If Max got herself killed by chasing after these stupid kids and Harrington, then that was her problem. And he wouldn't be held reliable...except his dad would hold him reliable.

The image of his dad growing into one of his infamous rage induced frenzies and knowing full-well what the result would be, ran a shiver

up his spine. Respect and responsibility. His dad was obsessed with those two words. Anytime he spoke his mind in the wrong tone, bam! Respect and responsibility. Anytime he acted a little rebellious, boom! Respect and responsibility.

He never wanted to hear those two words ever again in his life.

If something happened to Max, his dad would hold him accountable and would be more than happy to give a "lecture" on how he could be more respectful and more responsible. He felt the dread start up in his stomach at the mere thought of it.

Billy sighed, annoyed with himself. He could have been eaten by a literal monster tonight and yet the monster at home still scared him most of all.

He ran after Max and the other dickheads.

When he finally caught up to them, they were all standing in a row near some overgrown grass. He hadn't realized how high up they were until now. From where they stood they could see the almost never ending forest of trees and downtown Hawkins in the distant.

Sinclair had a pair of binoculars up to his eyes. They were actually pretty good quality and they matched his make-shift camouflage look. "It's the lab." Sinclair slowly lowered the binoculars, a worried expression on his features. "They were going back home."

Billy scrunched his eyebrows together. He knew who they were talking about but he still didn't understand. "The faceless dogs live in a lab?"

Again he did not get an answer.

...

"Why am I the only one who has a problem with this?" Billy asked for about the fortieth time.

He was getting on Harrington's last nerve apparently. "*Oh, my God!* Will you stop your griping?"

Billy rose his hands in the air in mock surrender and sassily said, "Oh, *excuse me* for actually thinking rationally."

They were heading towards this lab. This lab where the dog creatures lived. He did not know why they were doing this, no one would give him a reasonable answer. He was forced to go with them because of Max but that didn't mean he had to like this. At all. So, while they hiked the several miles down the hill and through the forest to get to this lab, he complained and made sure to annoy everyone. Especially Max and Harrington.

"Rationally?" Max muttered, unconvinced.

Billy nodded. "Yeah."

It was Max's turn to scoff. "Didn't know you could think rationally."

"Don't test me," Billy grumbled in a low voice. He enjoyed the little spark of fear that sprang up in her eyes.

"Didn't know you could *think*," Harrington quipped.

Billy glared at the back of his head. "We are heading towards where the things that just tried to kill us live. And we have no means of escape, like a car. And we have no weapons."

"Steve has his bat," Dustin pointed out.

"And I have my wrist-rocket," Sinclair said, confidently.

Billy rolled his eyes. "We have no *real* weapons that can cause *actual* damage."

"Quiet," Harrington said, suddenly slowing his walking pace.

"Am I being too blunt for King Steve's liking?"

"Seriously, be quiet... Do you hear that?"

Everyone paused for a second to listen; someone else was nearby. They could hear them calling out to them. "Who's there?" the voice demanded.

Billy didn't know the voice but Harrington appeared to recognize it and started heading towards it. The others started following him. When Harrington stopped, they had stepped out of the woods and were only several feet away from the gate that led to this lab. There was a car parked by the gate and two people standing in the grass looking their way. One was a teen boy dressed in clothes that almost seemed too big for him and he had a dopey looking haircut. He also seemed vaguely familiar. Maybe he went to the same high school as him or maybe Billy had seen him at one of the many parties he had been to. The other person was a teen girl that he knew instantly as Nancy Wheeler, Harrington's ex-girlfriend.

She might be a priss but...she wasn't terrible on the eyes. Not drop dead gorgeous or as sexy as her mother but, still. Not bad at all.

The two recognized Harrington immediately. "Steve?" they asked in stereo.

"Nancy?" Harrington said, almost sounding concerned.

"Jonathan," Dustin said, greeting the teen boy.

Oh, Jonathan Byers. Nancy's new fling. Bet Harrington's just loving this.

But if Harrington was bothered by seeing his ex with her new boyfriend, he hid it well. The group of five walked up to the duo. "What are you doing here?" Nancy asked Harrington.

He threw the question right back at her. "What are *you* doing here?"

"I would really love to know what I'm doing here," Billy said to himself.

"We're looking for Mike and Will," Nancy said, answering Harrington's question.

Curly hair's eyes suddenly widened to the size of saucers. He pointed to the lab. "They're not in there, are they?"

Nancy and Byers shared a glance. "We're not sure."

"Why?" Byers asked.

Billy took in another long drag and then flicked his cigarette away. This whole mess was nonsense. And what do you do with nonsense? Make fun of it. So that's just what he did. "Because apparently the pact of faceless, monster dogs who attacked us at the junkyard and eat cats live in the energy lab." He then turned to Nancy and smiled his best charming smile. "Also, I think you're a priss but you're not too bad. Your mom passed you all the good genes. And at the rate that you're going through boyfriends... If you ever wanna go out, I'd be fine with that."

He wasn't sure what was funnier: Nancy's confused expression, Byers' don't mess with my woman look, or Harrington throwing his hands in the air and saying, "Shit, man, do you ever stop talking?"

Billy paused for three seconds before saying a very dry, "No."

A second later, a chorus of howls could be heard coming from the direction of the lab. Everyone shut up and turned to the lifeless looking building, with an increasing air of terror rising around the group. The monster dogs were in the lab. They needed to get outta here while they still could and thankfully, Byers and Nancy had a car.

But apparently they weren't leaving until Byers and Nancy could save their younger brothers. Why was anyone's guess, because if they were in the lab with those blood thirsty things than they were as good as dead. And Billy had no problem voicing this opinion out loud, to which he was either straight up ignored or Harrington was yelling at him to shut up.

Funny thing about Steve Harrington, up till this point he was so hard to read and it was even harder to get a reaction out of him. Now, because of the stress it was so easy to push his buttons and irritate the hell out of him. Billy still couldn't read the guy very well but provoking annoyance was better than nothing.

Curly hair supposedly finally got the gate to open up and Nancy and Byers were quick to jump in their brown car and speed up to the lab. "Well, they're dead," Billy said, crossing his arms. Harrington glared at him but kept his mouth shut. Sinclair and Dustin were both pacing in small circles, anxious about their friends and this whole situation. Max was, for once in her life, quiet. She stood off to the sidelines of

the road, her hands in her pockets, staring at the asphalt. She seemed tired and shaken up. To be fair, it had been a hell of a night.

The brown car was suddenly racing down the driveway, honking their horn frantically. Billy, Harrington, Sinclair, and Dustin were quick to get of the way. Once on the sidelines, the car speed past them.

Um... Are they just abandoning us or...?

Thankfully, they weren't being abandoned. A Hawkins police truck was close behind the other car and screeched to a halt right in front of them. The driver, a guy with a thick mustache, demanded in a booming voice, "Get in!"

Nobody had to be told twice. They all piled into the vehicle and once Harrington slammed the passenger side door, they took off at break neck speed. "Where are we going?" Billy asked, to which he didn't get a response.

He sighed deeply.

What was with these assholes and not wanting to answer my questions?

5. Chapter Five

Author's Note: Thank you for the support! I'm glad people are liking my little story. It has been so much fun to write. I have been writing an Avengers story for over a year now (which you are more then welcomed to take a look at) and it is so complicated and the chapters are sooo long and I'm writing like forty plus characters...so this is a breath of fresh.

Also, I just wanted to clarify that this is not a Steve/Billy story. It is a Steve and Billy friend fic, eventually, but no slash. If you prefer to read it as pre-slash, fine, but I have no intention of pairing them together. Thank you.

Now, enough chit-chat! On to the story!

~~~~~

### *Chapter Five: The Pity Party*

Hopper followed Nancy and Jonathan, driving a bit too fast to be legal, but he was the Chief of Police so he got a pass. And even if he didn't, what was he going to do? Ticket himself? Steve was in the passenger seat, tightly holding onto the door and the dashboard, trying desperately not to be a backseat driver. It was really hard to do, especially during curves and when the road went down a steep hill.

Dustin, Lucas, and Max were piled in the back seat, clamoring about everything. Hargrove was in the back too, though he didn't say much for a change. He asked where they were going about a thousand times, to which Hopper bluntly ignored him.

It wasn't just him he ignored. It was like the Chief had one thing on his mind and that was get as far away from the Hawkins Energy Lab as fast as possible. Steve eyed the weary cop and realized for the first time that he was dressed in scrubs and not his uniform. He saw how tired and stressed he was and he had to wonder, what the hell happened in that lab?

Nothing good by the looks of it.

About ten minutes later, Steve knew where they were going. They were traveling the familiar wooded road that lead to the Byers' house. They screeched to a halt a few feet away from the house and Hopper parked his car. He was quick to jump out, run over to Jonathan's car, and help Mrs. Byers with her younger son, Will.

Mrs. Byers was dressed in scrubs too and looked like a wreck. It was obvious that she had been crying but for what reason would remain unknown for the time being. Will was unconscious, dressed in a hospital gown and wrapped up in a blanket. Jonathan and Hopper were quick to help the poor woman with her boy and got the two of them in the house.

Everyone else was slightly slower to get out of their cars and make their way to the house. But soon they were all in the old, little house. The first thing Steve saw was that all over the floor, up to the sides of the walls, and even the ceiling in some spots, were all of these drawings of what looked like blue vines. They were quickly drawn and were on several different kinds of paper but what they were was clear: twisting vines.

He thought back to when he had forced his way into this house almost a year ago. Christmas lights hanging everywhere, the alphabet painted on a wall in black paint, a hole in the opposite wall, a bear trap in the hallway, and two teens ready to fight with a monster from another dimension.

Good times. *Not.*

But compared to the state of the house last year and right now, a few pictures on the wall was nothing. Will was laid on the old, sofa near the window, Jonathan was hovering nearby. Nancy wasn't too far away from him, but she was preoccupied with keeping an eye on her brother. Mike was quiet. He just sat down on the floor by the coffee table that had been moved so that it was leaning against the far wall. There were some games sitting on the table in a nice little pile and the boy just stared at them with a sad gaze.

Hopper led Mrs. Byers to her room and neither of them came out for

a while. That left Steve, Hargrove, and the other three kids just staring around at the inside of the house. A million questions were running through Steve's mind but between being caught up in looking at the pictures and feeling a very depressed and thick air in the room, he didn't say a word.

Hargrove had no problem saying a word.

"So...do the Byers' need to hire an interior decorator or what?"

Steve sighed and turned to him. "What is your problem?"

"I don't see anything wrong with saying what's on my mind."

"Nobody asked you what's on your mind."

Hargrove half smirked and made his way to the kitchen where he leaned up against the sink and started smoking a new cigarette. With the gloomy air having been broken, Dustin and Lucas took this as an opportunity to approach Mike. "Hey, Mike?" Dustin asked.

Mike didn't steal his eyes away from the games. Lucas sat down next to him, Dustin was quick to copy him. Lucas eyed his friend for a second before softly asking, "What happened in that lab?"

Mike didn't say anything for about a minute and Steve was beginning to think that he wasn't going to answer the question but then he started telling them his story. "Will is connected to it. To all of it. The doctors at the lab thought they could help him. Thought that Will could help them stop it all. It was a trap. Those dogs were everywhere...Bob didn't make it out."

The whole time Mike had been talking, he had come closer and closer to welling up and Nancy had come closer and closer until she stood basically right behind him looking about ready to fall to her knees and wrap her arms around him. "Bob? Joyce's boyfriend?" Dustin asked. Mike nodded his head. Well, now it made sense why Mrs. Byers had looked like a wreck. To lose a loved one to those things...it was unimaginable.

Mike's emotions must have been rubbing off on him, because Steve suddenly found it difficult to continue watching the poor boy sitting

with his friends without feeling a horrible sadness. He walked into the kitchen to get away from it, knowing full well that stupid Hargrove would be in there. But extreme annoyance was eons better than extreme powerlessness. Surprisingly enough, Hargrove didn't say anything for once in his life to him as he came in and sat down at the table. Max was close behind him and sat down across from him, looking just as much of an outsider as he felt.

To be fair, Steve was kind of an outsider. He knew what really happened, yeah, and he fought the Demogorgon with his nail-bat, sure, but he came into this whole thing way late in the game. He didn't talk with anyone else about any of this except of course with Nancy. He didn't know any of the kids that well, except for Mike and even then it was awkward because he was the guy dating the kid's older sister. It was only today that he started talking with Dustin and Lucas. *Really* talking to them. Though he made things right with Jonathan by buying him that new camera for Christmas last year and making sure he never made fun of him again, they didn't socialize in school. And of course he didn't go out of his way to talk with Mrs. Byers or Chief Hopper.

So, here he was in the kitchen. Feeling like an outsider.

He glanced over at Max. The redhead was eyeing the kitchen, trying to focus on something so that she would have something to do. If he felt like an outsider he could just imagine how Max must be feeling, or Hargrove for that matter.

Call him petty, but he wasn't about to try and talk to Hargrove. Not after he had been so obnoxious. He would much rather talk to Max. "You alright?" She started when he spoke, surprised at the sudden break in the silence.

"Yeah," she said, quick to cover up the fact that he startled her. "I'm fine."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," she said again. Steve raised an eyebrow at her. She glanced away and shook her head. "I don't know, it's just...I guess, I can't believe that everything Lucas told me is true."



Steve nodded. "Understandable. It sometimes takes a while to wrap your head around everything and...accept it."

"It took you awhile to accept it?"

Looking back on how he had reacted, he almost wanted to laugh. The Demogorgon had come out of the freaking ceiling and he was left staring up at it completely shell shocked. Had Jonathan not grabbed his arm and yanked him to follow him down the hall he honestly thought he would have just stood there like an idiot and gotten himself killed. When the monster disappeared for a few minutes, Nancy and Jonathan prepared themselves for its return and Steve had stood there mumbling to himself that this was crazy.

In hindsight, he had freaked out and he really wished he hadn't. At least he could laugh at himself now that it was in the past. But seriously, why did everyone else react and handle this so much better than him? Even Billy Hargrove reacted calmer than he had.

Steve shook his head, dismissing his thoughts. "It took me a bit before I accepted the truth, but when you're dealing with this supernatural shit, that's to be expected."

Max nodded, seemingly satisfied with his answer and with the fact that being a little freaked out with all of this was perfectly okay.

"You know, I still don't know the whole story to all of this so-called supernatural shit," Hargrove said, voice far too loud for the bleak air that was still settled in the house.

Steve glared at Hargrove as he took a puff from his cigarette. "I don't think Mrs. Byers would appreciate you smoking in her house."

He half chuckled. "If she asks me to stop, fine. But I'm not going to stop just cuz King Steve tells me to stop."

What was it about this guy that just made him mad? He always pushed his buttons in a way that was more annoying than anything Tommy or Carol could say. But at school he simply ignored it, not wanting to bother with coming up with a comeback or reacting. All the stuff Hargrove did at school, the stupid comments, the pushing

him around in gym class, he only did it to get a rise out of him anyways. So why give the idiot what he wanted? Now he was tired and stressed and a bit depressed if he was being honest with himself, so when his buttons were pushed, he couldn't help himself from reacting. "Listen here, you pathetic creep, I-"

"Guys!" Steve spun to the source of the agitated voice. It was Nancy. She glowered at him and Hargrove. Then she pointedly looked at Mike and the other two boys. "Now is not the time to start an argument."

Steve felt the embarrassment instantly. God, he shouldn't have to be called out by his *girlfriend* to realize that now was not the time to get into a stupid feud over basically nothing with Billy Hargrove of all people.

Girlfriend?

Ex-girlfriend?

He didn't know. They had a fight, yeah, but he hadn't broken up with her and she sure as hell hadn't broken up with him. Everyone assumed that they were exs now but...it wasn't official yet. Right?

Hopper suddenly came out of Mrs. Byers' room and headed straight for the blue telephone hanging on the wall. He dialed and was quick to get an answer. "Hello? This is Police Chief Jim Hopper...I got this number from Dr. Sam Owens...*Owens*. O-W-E-N-S." Well, he was in an impatient mood but given everything that happened tonight, it was warranted.

As Hopper continued to talk, and yell, at whoever it was that he had called, Dustin, Lucas, and Mike made their way into the kitchen. The trio was quiet, unusually so given they all could be so rambunctious at times. Steve got up from his seat so that there would be room for the three boys to sit. They all did. Dustin and Lucas seemed to fixate on the wooden table. Mike still glanced out at the games on the coffee table. Steve stood out of the way and watched as Nancy went to Jonathan, who had not left his brother's side since they got here. He saw the worried, concerned, loving look in her eyes as she looked at Jonathan and it was at that point that he knew. He and Nancy had

broken up without his knowledge and she was already moving on.

God, he hated love.

Screwed him over in the end.

He had had hope that maybe he had been overreacting at the Halloween party. Nancy had been drunk after all so...of course she loved him... Guess not. Nancy made him a better person, a person who didn't need shallow, one dimensional friends like Tommy H. or Carol. He didn't need to be the king of the school because it didn't matter in the long run. Nancy mattered. He would have given up anything to be with her. In many ways, he guessed he had.

Being "King Steve" hadn't been great and looking back at it, it wasn't what he wanted. But...at least he had people around him. Friends. He walked away from all of the popularity hierarchy of Hawkins High in November of last year. All he really had left was Nancy. And now... he had nothing.

Hopper's yelling dragged him from his internalized pity party. "I don't know how many people are left alive!...I am the Police! I just said that! Chief Jim Hopper...Yes, that's the number I gave you...Yes, you can call me back." With a grunt he slammed the phone on the receiver and it was a miracle that the entire phone didn't crash to the floor. Hopper turned around and rubbed his head, looking so incredibly tired.

"They didn't believe you, did they?" Dustin questioned.

"We'll see."

"We'll see?" Dustin repeated, not sounding optimistic.

"Yeah." With that Hopper left the kitchen again to go back to the room where he had left Mrs. Byers.

"Okay," Hargrove said after a while. "So...I'm taking Max home now."

He hadn't even moved from his spot against the sink when Steve said a firm, "No."

Hargrove let out a small sigh and rubbed his head too. Was he tired? Or was that the tell-tale signs of stress that were covering his features? Maybe the night had more of an impact on Hargrove than Steve had originally thought. "Look, I followed you shitheads through the woods, followed you to this oh-so-important lab, and came into this broken down excuse of a home. The dogs aren't here."

"Demo-dogs," Dustin interrupted.

Hargrove slowly turned to the boy and glared him down. "What?"

Dustin swallowed hard and tried to explain. "D-demo-dogs... Demogorgon and dogs? You put it together and it's pretty awesome."

"What did I say about interrupting?" Dustin shut his mouth and stared down at the table. Hargrove faced Steve again. "The dogs aren't here, I followed you all around kingdom come, and now I'm done with this nonsense. I'm leaving and I'm taking Max with me."

He pushed himself away from the sink and headed towards Max. The girl very visibly flinched. Given how prone to violence Hargrove was at school, Steve could only imagine what that meant for Max. He didn't like the picture he painted inside his head. He was quick to get in-between Hargrove and where Max was sitting. "No. You're not."

Hargrove looked annoyed. "Do you not understand English, amigo?"

Steve calmly crossed his arms. "I understand...amigo."

Hargrove seemed on the verge of saying something, probably another insult or a stupidly obnoxious comment. But then he stopped himself, clicked his tongue, and said, "You want me to stick around, tell me the whole story."

Steve shook his head, not understanding. "I don't know what you-"

"The whole story. You, Sinclair, curly hair," he pointed at Max, "and this one were holding out on me at the junkyard. If you want me to stay, tell me the whole story." He wanted to know the whole story? Was that really what he was worried about? He knew that he must have just stared at Hargrove with this slacked jaw look on his face because he just couldn't figure this guy out. First he wanted to leave,

then he wanted to know the mysteries of Hawkins. There was no rhyme or reason with this guy. "C'mon. Is it so hard to simply tell me what happened?"

Steve tried to think of his words very carefully. "Listen, man, we're not supposed to-

Hargrove pointed at Max again. "You told this cunt."

Max shouted, "Shut up, Billy!"

She wasn't the only one upset with what Hargrove had called her. Steve's voice got louder. "Hey, watch the mouth!"

"Ah, Harrington is worried about language. Isn't that precious?"

"I swear to God-"

"All right," Hopper said, loud enough to gain everyone's attentions. Steve turned and saw that the cop had come back into the room, looking less than pleased. Nancy had come into the room too. "All right. Everyone calm down. *Now.*" Everyone did what he said. Hopper eyed the group, probably for the first time. When he glanced over at Hargrove, he didn't seem to recognize him. So he asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm Billy Hargrove." Hargrove said it as if it were obvious. But Hopper clearly had no clue who he was and still looked like he wanted more information.

"He goes to our school," Steve muttered, motioning between himself and Nancy.

Hopper nodded. "And what are you doing here?"

Hargrove crossed his arms over his bare chest. "I'm here for Max."

"Who's Max?" Nancy asked.

Max slightly rose her hand as she turned around in her chair. "I'm Max."

Hopper nodded again. It was clear he was just trying to get the full picture. "Okay and why are you here?"

"Yeah, Lucas," Dustin said, looking at Lucas in mock confusion. "Why?"

"Oh, be quiet!" Lucas snapped.

"Hey."

With Hopper saying only one word, everyone just shut up again. No wonder he was the Chief of the Police Department. Anyone with that kind of control over people deserved to be the head of a department like that. Lucas glanced away before looking up at Hopper. "I told Max about everything. Dustin and Steve were going after Dart and called me, so I brought Max along because...she wanted proof that what I told her was true."

Hopper didn't blink. He just looked to Max and calmly said, "Did you get your proof?"

Max nodded her head rapidly. "Yeah."

Steve ran his hand through his hair and finished up their story. "The dogs attacked us at the junkyard. Afterwards we followed them to the lab and found Nancy and Jonathan."

Hopper nodded, seemingly satisfied with the answers he got. Then he pointed between Max and Hargrove. "Still confused as to what the relationship is between you two."

"He's my brother," Max said.

And Jesus, was that a trigger word for Hargrove or what. "*Step-brother*," he corrected and he looked about ready to break someone's jaw. He probably wanted to break Max's. He glared at her with a look of almost pure hatred. "And you be quiet."

Steve had no clue why he suddenly felt a need to be so protective of the girl, especially since he literally only met her today. But what could he say? "Hey," he said stepping closer to Hargrove, "why don't you stop being a complete douche bag?"

Hargrove clenched his fists and stepped closer too. "Hey, why don't you stop sticking your nose into things that don't concern you?"

"*Hey*," Hopper said trying to get their attentions, but neither of them were listening.

"You know what your problem is, Hargrove?"

"No. I don't, why don't you tell me."

"All right, I will."

"Guys," Hopper tried again with no success. If either of them had been paying attention they would have seen that the Chief was growing more and more irritated by the second.

"You know what? No, I don't have a problem. *You* have a problem, Harrington."

"Oh, really? I'm intrigued as to what my problem is compared to everything wrong with you."

Hopper threw his hands in the air and closed the space between himself and the two teen boys. "All right, that's it." He grabbed them by the collars of their shirts and started to drag the both of them out of the room.

It had taken Steve by surprise, apparently it took Hargrove by surprise too, because he actually shut up for a second. The second did not last. "Get your damn hands off me."

Hopper was not intimidated by Hargrove's angry demand. He just seemed more determined in dragging them from the kitchen to the hall. "What are you doing?" Steve asked.

Hopper didn't even hesitate. "Putting you two in a time-out."

Steve almost did a double take. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Excuse me?" Hargrove snapped. "Do we look like we're three years old?"

"Nope. But you sure as hell act like a bunch of three-year-olds." Hopper opened the door that led to Jonathan's room, shoved the both of them in before coming into the room himself, and shut the door behind him. Hopper crossed his arms and looked between the two of them with a stern, don't mess with me boys, look.

Steve took in a deep breath to calm down. He had got caught up with the infuriating Hargrove again and he was now realizing what an asshole he must have been. "Look, I understand where you're coming from, Chief, I do. But I-"

Hopper shook his head. "No."

Steve stopped talking. Hargrove straightened his leather jacket and looked pissed. "I am not going to be pushed around by some over the hill cop, you-"

Hopper shook his head again. "No."

Hargrove snapped, "What do you mean no?"

"I mean *no*. Enough of this squabbling, school rivalry shit. Everyone is sick of it, *I'm* sick of it, and I'm done dealing with it when there are so many more important things to worry about. Did you not notice the monsters that are infecting our city?" Hopper uncrossed his arms and pointed behind him. "Did you two not realize that there is a woman in there mourning the loss of her boyfriend?" Steve glanced at the floor, again feeling stupid for getting caught up in stuff that didn't matter. Hopper let out a deep sigh. "Do whatever it is that you two need to do so that you guys can have some sort of truce." He glanced at Steve. "Fill him in about last year, keep bickering, kill each other, I don't care. Just do it quietly and don't make me have to come back in here for any reason." With his words spoken, and his words were literally law, Hopper left them.

The second the door latched shut, Steve let out a deep breath and rubbed his forehead. "Jesus Christ, now you've done it."

Hargrove let out a humorless laugh. "I've done it? *I've done it?*"

"Yeah, you! I sure as hell didn't act like some delinquent and act all



inappropriate when someone has just died!"

Hargrove shrugged his shoulders and stuck his hands in his jacket pockets. "People die every day. I don't get all worked up over it, especially when they're people I don't know."

Steve had a splitting headache. He muttered an exasperated, "Oh, my God," and sat down on the edge of Jonathan's bed.

"I wouldn't sit there if I was you. Hate for you to sit where your ex and her new guy have probably gone to town on each other."

Steve ran both of his hands through his hair, feeling himself growing more and more annoyed. "Just stop talking."

Hargrove half chuckled. "I'm gonna say no."

*"Please, stop talking."*

"What's the matter, pretty boy?" God, how Steve hated that mocking tone. "Gonna have a breakdown?"

Steve jumped up and pushed Hargrove into the wall. Again, he found Hargrove's surprise slightly amusing. "Oh, screw you! You have no right to mock me, not when every damn thing has gone to hell and back and...just...this is not how today was supposed to go."

"Poor Harrington, his plans fell through. News flash, I had a very different picture in my mind of how tonight was going to go and it certainly didn't involve you, a bunch of shithead kids, or faceless monsters!"

"No one is keeping you here!" Steve shouted. Oh, boy...Hopper was going to come back in here and kill them, wasn't he?

Hargrove looked like he wanted to throw his hands in the air. "No one is keeping me here? Are you sure about that? Cuz, I pretty sure that *you* are keeping me here!"

"Leave if you want to!"

"Without Max? Yeah, great plan. Then my dad can kick me around

and yell at me and tell me just how worthless I truly-" Hargrove suddenly stopped himself from continuing on. His expression had changed drastically. He had gone from appearing like the agitated, ass hat Steve knew so well, to looking suddenly shocked and fearful. Like he had said too much. And Steve felt a slight chill run down his spine.

Wait...what had he said? His dad would...would kick him around and yell at him? Did that mean...? *Oh...shit.*

Steve had a sinking suspicion but he quietly asked anyways, "What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing," Hargrove said harshly. But he couldn't take back what he said and Steve couldn't pretend that he didn't hear him. Because if what he was thinking was true then...was that why Hargrove was such a dick all the time to everyone including his step-sister? "How was your day supposed to go?"

Hargrove had said the question so fast Steve almost didn't hear it. Besides, he was too wrapped up in his thoughts of reevaluating everything he thought he knew about this guy. When it occurred to him that he had been asked a question he was again confused. "Huh? How was my day supposed to go?" The expression Hargrove had made Steve begin to wonder if this was the same snarky guy who pushed him down during gym class. He almost looked like...like he was pleading with him. Pleading with him to change the topic, to go with the sudden topic change, and to not ask any more questions. Given the circumstances, Steve was willing to go along with this. He walked back to Jonathan's bed and sat on the edge again. "Oh, my day. Right. I just...I was going to apologize to Nancy and everything would go back to normal. But then Dustin came and I helped him with his little Demogorgon. Not that apologizing would have made any bit of difference. Apparently, we've broken up without my knowledge and she's already moving on."

He had no idea why he just told Hargrove that last part. It wasn't any of his business. Maybe he subconsciously felt a need to tell him some secret inadvertently too. Although, a failed high school romance was nothing compared to the possibility of child abuse.

Hargrove had a funny look on his face. "You two didn't officially break-up?"

"No."

"But Tommy said-"

"Yeah, something you'll need to learn about being the new king of the school is that Tommy, Carol, and all those other shitheads say a lot of things."

"I'll keep that in mind." Hargrove glanced around Jonathan's room after that, clearly not knowing what to do or say next. He finally muttered, "Now what?"

Good question. After a few seconds of silence, Steve sighed and started, "A year ago, Will Byers disappeared." He then preceded to tell Hargrove everything. Everything about Hawkins lab, the gate to another dimension that the kids had named the Upside Down, the Demogorgon that took Will and killed Barb, the little girl with the superhuman powers. All of it. "And we were told that we couldn't talk about what really happened. Amongst ourselves, sure, but to anyone else, no. But, to hell with the rules, I guess."

Hargrove had pulled out the chair from Jonathan's desk and sat down as he listened to Steve's story. He didn't say a word the whole time. He just sat with his arms crossed as he listened. With the story finished, Hargrove nodded, seeming to understand. He looked a little overwhelmed though. "Huh."

That's all he said. Hargrove had gone on a nearly non-stop talking spree over stuff less significant than this. Steve felt himself wanting to smile. "Did I pile too much stuff on you at one time?"

Hargrove shook his head and tried to save face. As if being a little overwhelmed with the truth was a bad thing. And Steve realized that Hargrove was always trying to save face. Always trying to be the tough guy. Clearly his, I'm totally cool with this, I'm fine, attitude right now was a front. It made him begin to wonder how often Hargrove was just playing the part. Hargrove cleared his throat. "No, I'm just thinking...all of this would make a great Stephen King novel."

"You read?"

The question slipped out before he could stop himself. Hargrove glared at him. Given the stupidity of the question, Steve figured it was warranted. "I'm curious as to what that question insinuates. Does it mean, do I read Stephen King? Or does it mean, do I read period?"

Steve glanced at the bedroom door as he muttered, "Sorry."

Hargrove scoffed, "Second one it is. I'm not a total idiot you know."

"Dually noted."

They didn't say anything for a while after that. Hargrove was left with this thoughts of the truth and Steve was actually enjoying the silence. The stillness. No solemn or awkward air hung between them. No bickering, no stress of watching after the kids, no adrenaline rushes from fighting monsters...just peace and quiet after a hectic day. But then again, all good things come to an end. "Why does Byers have all this shit in his room?"

Steve half-heartedly rolled his eyes. He knew what Hargrove was talking about: all the cassette tapes and records stacked up on his desk and dresser, the mess of both dirty and clean clothes on the floor, several monster movie posters pasted on the walls, and of course, dozens of photo albums and photo film scattered around the room. And while Hargrove just stared around the room not understanding why all of this "shit" was in Jonathan's room, Steve just rubbed his forehead. "Do you have a problem with silence or what?" Then it hit him like a ton of bricks. "*Oh*. I just figured it out. For real this time. You're an attention seeker."

"Everyone is an attention seeker, dumb ass."

"Yeah, but, that's why any time it's quiet you speak and any time you get ignored, you get more annoying. Am I right?"

Hargrove glanced away and again, harshly said, "No."

Steve couldn't help but feel a small sense of being proud. "Wow, who knew I was perceptive."

"You're not."

"Whatever, man." Then he looked at Hargrove, who was still glancing away. Steve, for the life of him, couldn't drop what Hargrove had accidentally let slip out. That's why after he ran his hand through his hair again he said, "By the way, your secret is safe with me."

Hargrove flinched and met his gaze. "I..." he trailed off, seemingly at a loss for words. Then he quickly said, "I don't know what you're going on about but...that's fine." That was probably going to be the closest thing he would ever get to a thank you. All of a sudden they heard the sound of the kitchen chairs screeching on the floor, like all the kids sitting jumped up at once. The two teens gave each other a questioning look and both stood at the same time. "What's going on?"

"Let's see." Steve reached the door first and opened it. The moment he stepped out into the hall he was almost run over by Mike, Dustin, Lucas, and Max, who were sprinting like their lives depended on it. No one else was running and no one had yelled that something bad was happening, so he chalked it up to dumb kids being dumb. "Hey! Don't run in the house!"

"Sorry, Steve," Dustin said as he ran past him.

All four kids ran to the last door and wasted no time in going inside. Steve followed them immediately, curiosity taking over. "What are you doing?"

"Trying to see what Mike is talking about," Lucas muttered.

The room appeared to be Will's bedroom, filled with drawling utensils and more "kid-like" things. Mike had gone fully into the room while the other three kids stayed in the doorway, watching as Mike grabbed up a piece of paper and walked back with it in his hands. He handed it to Dustin, who glanced over it and then said, "The shadow monster." That's certainly what the drawing seemed to be of: a giant, foreboding shadow monster. It hovered over the trees and almost blended in with the clouds. And there was lightening branching out from the clouds. Red lightening.

The other kids glanced over it to and seemed to recognize it. Steve,

on the other hand, had never seen this thing before and had no clue what it had to do with the larger picture. Mike was quick to explain before he had even thought to ask. "It got Will that day on the field. The doctor said it was like a virus, it infected him. And it connected him to everything. To the tunnels, to the monsters, to the Upside Down, to everything."

His explanation, although helpful, was spoken just too damn fast. It left Steve's head spinning. "Whoa. Slow down. Just slow down."

Mike sighed, appearing to be anxious to just get to the point where everyone knew everything. "Okay, so, the shadow monster's inside everything. And if the vines feel something like pain, then so does Will."

"And so does Dart," Lucas added.

Well, that didn't sound good. If Will was infected with this thing, then was he even still there? Or was he part of the enemy now? And this shadow monster, was its virus spreading?

"It's like what Mr. Clarke taught us," Dustin said, getting all excited. "The hive mind."

Max shook her head, looking lost. "Hive mind?"

"A collective consciousness. It's a super-organism."

Mike nodded in agreement with everything Dustin had said. "Exactly and this is the thing that controls everything." He pointed to the shadow monster in the picture. "It's the brain."

"What like the Mind Flayer?" Hargrove said. Steve had almost forgotten that he was standing basically beside him. The guy hadn't said a word for longer than a minute. Dustin and Mike both looked at Hargrove in realization and at the same Lucas snapped his fingers, as if to say, that's it!

Steve was lost again. So was Max. That's why they both asked, "The what?" at the same time. Mike sighed again, looking no less anxious, and stepped back into the room. He rummaged around Will's room for a few seconds before finding what he was looking for: *The*

## *Dungeons and Dragons Manual.*

Once he had the book in his hand, he, Dustin, and Lucas all ran back to the kitchen. "I guess we're supposed to follow," Hargrove muttered. Steve nodded and went into the kitchen himself, Max and Hargrove close behind him. The three boys were already standing around the table, focused on flipping the pages in the book.

"What's going on?" Nancy asked, stepping into the room. Jonathan was by her side looking a mixture of worried and tired. It must really suck to have to deal with all this supernatural shit that seemed to only happen to his brother. And two years in a row to top it off.

"We think we know what the shadow monster is," Lucas said, not taking his eyes away from the book. Nancy looked confused but Jonathan seemed to understand and went to get Hopper. The gruffy cop was out and standing around the table with the rest of them in no time. He looked like he had about a hundred question.

But before he could ask them, they boys found what they were looking for and dropped the book to the table. "The Mind Flayer," Dustin presented. Sure enough, there was a small picture and a blurb about a creature called the Mind Flayer.

"What the hell is that?" Hopper asked.

"It's a monster from an unknown dimension. It's so ancient that it doesn't even know its true home." Steve knew jack-shit about Dungeons and Dragons, so he knew he must have just looked lost. Overs must have looked lost too because Dustin continued explaining. "Okay, it enslaves races of other dimensions by taking over their brains using its highly-developed psionic powers."

Well...that sounded awful.

Hopper shook his head, unconvinced. "Oh, my God, none of this is real. This is a kids' game."

That seemed a bit hypocritical. After all, the Demogorgon was named after a made-up creature from the game. The game might not be real but these things from the Upside Down sure as hell were, so who

cared about the metaphor?

"This is a manual and it's not for kids," Dustin said very matter-of-factly. Steve liked that kid. "So unless you know something that we don't, this is the best metaphor-

"Analogy," Lucas interrupted.

Dustin just stared at his friend. "Analogy? That's what you're worried? *That's* what you're worried about? Okay, *fine*. An analogy for understanding whatever the hell this thing is."

"Okay," Nancy said trying to get them back on track. "So this Mind Flayer thing...what does it want?"

"To conquer us, basically. It believes itself to be the master race."

Steve nodded, finally understanding this thing. "Like the Germans?"

Hargrove scoffed and said, "Nazis. You don't do so well in school do you?"

Steve ignored that last part. Dustin continued on. "Yeah, if the Nazis were from another dimension, totally. It views other races, like us, as inferior to itself."

"It wants to spread," Mike added. "Take over other dimensions."

"We are talking about the destruction of our world as we know it," Lucas said, waving his hands around as he talked. Jesus...well, that's just great. If there was ever a time to start panicking, it would be now. How were they supposed to fight a big, mind-controlling shadow?

"If we kill this brain," Nancy started, taking the book from the three boys to glance over it herself, "then we kill everything it controls?"

"We win," Mike said.

"Theoretically." Lucas just had to be pessimist again.

"Great," Hopper muttered as he walked around the table. He took the



book from Nancy. "So how do we kill this thing? Shoot it with fireballs or something?"

Hargrove chuckled, "Fireballs? Amateur move."

All the questions floating around Steve's head about the miniature Demogorgons and this shadow monster, all flew out of his head. And for a few minutes all he could wonder was, how in the hell did Billy Hargrove know about Dungeons and Dragons?

Dustin chuckled too and shook his head. "No. No fireballs. You simply summon an undead army, uh, because you see zombies don't have brains, and well, the Mind Flayer like brains..." Hopper just stared at the boy. Dustin cleared his throat and awkwardly said, "It's just a game."

Hopper slammed the book shut and threw it on the table. "What the hell are we doing here?" Whether he was asking the group at the table or just himself would remain unseen.

"I thought we were waiting for your military backup," Dustin said, a hint of sass in his tone.

"We are," Hopper said pinching the bridge of his nose.

"How are they gonna stop this? You can't just shoot this with guns," Mike said, on the verge of yelling.

"You don't know that! We don't know anything!"

"We know it's already killed everybody in that lab," Mike said, rebuking what Hopper said.

Lucas was quick to join in. "And we know the monsters are gonna molt again."

Following the other two's leads, Dustin added his two cents. "And we know that it's only a matter of time before those tunnels reach this town."

"They're right," said a fairly familiar voice. Everyone either turned around or looked up and saw Mrs. Byers standing a few feet away

from the kitchen. Her eyes were red rimmed and laced with determination. "We have to kill it. *I* want to kill it."

Hopper walked up to her and appeared to try and be sympathetic. "Me too. Me too, Joyce, okay? But how do we do that? We don't exactly know what we're dealing with here."

Mike looked like he had a light bulb moment. "No. But he does." He quickly walked out of the kitchen and into the living room. He stared at the sleeping Will. "If anyone knows how to destroy this thing, it's Will. He's connected to it. He'll know its weakness."

Everyone made their way into the living room and glanced over the boy. He looked so peaceful, so calm in sleep. You'd never imagine that he was being controlled by a monster from another world.

"I thought we couldn't trust him anymore," Max mumbled. "That he's a spy for the Mind Flayer now."

Mike nodded his head. "Yeah, but...he can't spy if he doesn't know where he is."

After all of this, almost dying, the constant bickering with Hargrove, the revelation that he and Nancy were done, and now that a shadow creature was trying to end the world, Steve didn't have it in him to even try to think what that meant. So he asked, "What do you mean?" He didn't get an answer but after ten seconds of silence Hargrove jabbed him in the ribs with his elbow. It didn't hurt but that didn't stop Steve from turning to him and saying, "What the hell?"

Hargrove crossed his arms and muttered, "It's not fun having your questions not answered, is it?"

Steve sighed. Semi-truce between himself and Hargrove or not, he had a feeling that he wouldn't be able to survive the rest of the night without an aspirin.

## 6. Chapter Six

### *Chapter Six: The Interior Decorators*

The plan was simple: make the Byers' shed look unrecognizable so that Will Byers, who apparently was possessed by the telepathic monster from D and D, couldn't figure out where he was and send hundreds of little killer dogs after them. As plans go, it wasn't the worst one Billy had ever heard of. After said plan was set in stone, everyone went about clearing all of the junk from the shed. Then they split up into smaller groups to divide and concur the other tasks that had to be done. Such as, disguising two chairs from the kitchen, gathering all sorts of material to tape and staple onto the walls and the ceiling of the shed, and actually taping and stapling said materials up on the walls and the ceiling of the shed. Billy was helping with the latter of the three with Harrington and Nancy.

The two were quiet as they worked. Billy had had no problem being annoying for the first few minutes but then he found himself going quiet. It wasn't that he didn't have anything on his mind, he had a lot of shit on his mind. It was just...for once he found it difficult to be the jackass in the group. At least right now. He assumed that once the aliens from a tear in time and space were no longer a threat and once he fully wrapped his head around everything Harrington had told him, he'd be back to normal.

Or whatever "normal" was for him.

It sort of bothered him that he was so bothered by the truth. He had wanted to know so badly. Now he did and...it really freaked him out. A few monster dogs attacking them in a junkyard was nothing. He could take that in stride. But the fact that there was more than just a few of these dogs and the fact that they weren't just mutated dogs, that they were baby monsters from a literal other dimension and that there were kids with superpowers...yeah, now we were getting into a whole new territory of craziness that he wasn't exactly sure how to process.

*Like, seriously. How am I supposed to process this?*

At first it had been easy to just save face and pretend it was no big deal. Then there was all this shit with the so-called Mind Flayer and here he was now in a shed, hammering a piece of plywood over the shed's window. But now...it was quiet. And it took too much effort to be an asshole at the moment. So, he was left with his thoughts and that was the last place he wanted to be in.

And on top of all of that, he could not believe he had slipped up so horribly. He actually let the words, "*Then my dad can kick me around,*" slip out of his mouth. He was freaking idiot.

He had always been so careful. Around literally everyone. The only two people on Earth who knew about his dad was Susan and Max, and then Max didn't even know everything because she almost always happened to be out of the house when his dad had a real fit and the beatings were more serious.

And he had let it slip out. Now Steve Harrington of all people knew. And while he absolutely despised the idea of anyone knowing, he wasn't exactly sure that Harrington knowing was a terrible thing. It sure as hell wasn't a good thing, but it wasn't as world shattering as he had thought.

Harrington was a douchebag. On normal days, it was hard to get a reaction out of him. He was an okay jock. He was madly in love with Nancy Wheeler. He used to be the King of Hawkins High, but now he literally had like no friends and no popularity status at all. And surprisingly, he wasn't cruel.

Billy had heard stories from Tommy H. that Harrington used to be... well, for lack of a better word, a bully. Like a real bully. He had no problem making fun of artsy people, the eggheads, the band geeks, and everyone else who did not fall into the High School's popular click. He even heard about the time Harrington broke Byers' camera.

Then he turned bitch because of his love for Nancy "The Priss" Wheeler.

But come on, how often did people actually change? They *didn't* change. Period. End of sentence.

No matter how many times Neil would apologize to Susan, and before that, his many short term girlfriends, and before that, Billy's mother for all of the shouting and abuse...it was never going to stop. It was never going to change.

People never changed.

Then there was Harrington...

With the words having slipped out of his mouth, Billy had felt the anxiety almost instantly. Because this was his biggest secret, his biggest weakness. And he just told it to someone who could use it to their advantage and make his life as miserable as he wanted it to be. And considering how he had treated Harrington the last week...he was in deep shit now.

But Harrington didn't connect the dots and start holding it over him. He didn't suddenly turn on him and say some snarky comment. For a few seconds, he didn't say anything. He just looked...shocked? Concerned? Whatever it was, it was not the expression he should have had on. And then he quietly had asked, *"What do you mean by that?"*

It was then, right then and there did Billy realize that maybe people didn't change but Harrington had. No way would the guy who Tommy H. and Carol had described have asked that question. He would have gone straight into harassing him. Because the question was a way out. It was an escape. Because Billy could change the subject now. And he did. And Harrington had went with it.

*Today's just a day for surprises, isn't it?*

"Hey," Nancy suddenly said, breaking the silence in the shed. Billy figured she wasn't talking to him but that didn't stop him from looking over his shoulder at her. Not surprisingly, she had spoken to get Harrington's attention. Harrington looked to her with a borderline hopeful expression.

*Well, this is just sad.*

And he didn't mean that in a snarky way. It actually was sad to see

the guy so hopelessly in love with a chick who clearly was in love with another dude. Sad. Only word for it. Nancy tentatively and awkwardly started to say, "What you did...with the kids...that was pretty cool."

Harrington let out the breath he had been holding and nodded his head, quickly hiding his hope of rekindling the relationship. He climbed up on the stepladder nearby and straightened the torn blanket that was partially hanging on the wall. He stapled a nice straight row of staples into the cloth. "Well, you know... Those shitheads can be real trouble."

Nancy nodded slowly. "Yeah. I know." The air in the shed wasn't filled with that eager, adrenaline rush, hurry up we got a plan, feel anymore. It was filled with all the awkwardness that came from two people when their relationship crashed and burned. And boy, did their relationship crash and burn spectacularly. It shocked him that Nancy had cheated on Harrington. The shock was simply because Nancy Wheeler seemed like the biggest priss out there and not too many prisses cheated on their jock boyfriends with artsy, loners like Jonathan Byers.

But hey, if this night taught him anything it was that nothing and no one was ever what they seemed to be on surface level.

Take Hawkins for example. A few hours ago, he was annoyed by it for being the picture-perfect image of the American dream and was just praying for a flaw in the suburban nightmare.

An edge.

Hawkins had a major flaw, it had a whole hell of a lot of edge to it, and if you weren't careful, you could get sucked up into the nightmare that was the truth.

Billy finished up with his hammering and not being able to take the silence in the shed and the loudness of his own thoughts anymore, he said, "You know, when I said that the Byers' needed an interior decorator this is not what I had in mind."

"Attention seeker," Harrington said, with an almost smug look on his

face.

Billy frowned. Harrington might not be cruel about it, but he still hated the fact that someone could see through him so well. He put the hammer on the ground and straightened his jacket. "I'll be back with more materials," he muttered as he started to leave the shed. Harrington had stepped off of the stepladder and when he passed by him, he shoved him into the wall.

Nancy let out a surprise sound but Harrington didn't even blink. "Real mature," he called out, as Billy left the shed and headed back to the house.

Sinclair and curly hair were rummaging through the trash because of course they were. The only other person outside was Mrs. Byers. She had taken off the clothes hanging on her clothesline and cut the rope with a pair of scissors. She was then trying to wind up the rope but fumbled with because she hadn't put the scissors down. She let out an agitated huff, threw the scissors to the ground, and tried using both hands. When that still didn't work and she was still fumbling, she glanced around until she spotted Billy.

"Excuse me," she said, waving for him to come over. "Would you mind? I can't seem to get this damn rope to cooperate."

He almost half chuckled and nodded.

*Well, I should help before she throws something else.*

He changed the direction he had been walking in and headed towards the frazzled looking woman. The word "frazzled" was kinda an understatement. She was still dressed in scrubs with a black coat over top, her brown hair was an uncombed mess, and her eyes were still puffy from crying. And yet, there was this sort of crazed determination to save her son, to kill this Mind Flayer who apparently was responsible for her boyfriend's death.

She certainly wasn't as drop dead gorgeous as Karen Wheeler but she was pretty.

You know, if you ignored that borderline deranged look in her eye.

Once he reached her, he smiled, trying to be the charmer again. "Happy to help, Mrs. Byers."

Unlike Mrs. Wheeler, Mrs. Byers paid no attention to his smile or his open shirt. She just shook her head. "Joyce, please. Here." She handed him the rope. He took it from her and easily winded it up. It wasn't that hard really. He figured she had been having such troubles because of her impatience and because of her jittery movements. "You're here for your step-sister?"

The question took him off guard for a second because he had no clue where it even came from. But he did what he did best and saved face. "Yeah. Well, it was getting late and all."

He finished up with the rope and gave it back to her. She nodded her head in some sort of thanks and then pointed to some cardboard that was sitting in the grass about a foot away. "Do you mind again?" He nodded and went to grab it, while Joyce found the scissors she had thrown earlier. "That was sweet of you to go looking for your step-sister."

Billy almost did a double take. "Sweet"? *"Sweet"*? Clearly, this lady didn't know him at all.

With his arms full with assorted pieces of cardboard, he turned back to her. "Not really. I'm not exactly sweet."

Joyce slightly raised an eyebrow at him. "Then what are you?"

"An annoying asshole," Byers muttered under his breath as he walked by them.

"Jonathan!" Joyce said in surprise. Byers didn't stop though, he just kept walking towards the shed.

Billy chuckled, "He's not too far off the mark. Although, I prefer charming, annoying asshole."

Joyce let out a small scoff. "Oh. I see. The bad boy type. You were part of the yelling I heard earlier. What was the argument about?"

"I wanted to leave and King Steve was very insistent that I stay."



"And you don't like to be told what to do. Stubborn one are you? That can lead to a lot of trouble. Believe me, I know."

"Thanks for the cliché attempt at advice."

"Yeah, you're welcome. Now," she closed some of the space between them and gave him a hard stare. "I *really* hope the shouting is done now."

And Jesus, if she hadn't looked scary before she certainly looked scary now.

He nodded. "Yeah, it is." After a pause he added, "Probably."

"Good. Let's take this to the shed." Then as they walked to the shed with supplies in hand, Joyce suddenly did a complete 180. "Oh, and one more thing. Thank you for helping us with this. You could have left by now and you didn't so, thank you."

This lady was hard to pin down. First she seemed like a heartbroken, grieving girlfriend, then she was as perceptive as Harrington and seemed to have no patience for him or his attitude, then she was the scary mother with a potential lethal pair of scissors, and now was the sweet and kind woman. Regardless, he was taken aback by what she said but he was again quick to shrug it off like it was nothing. "I, um, only stayed cuz of curiosity and Max's refusal to leave."

"Trouble taking thank yous too, eh?" Joyce muttered as they entered the shed. Harrington and Nancy were still in there, but the Police Chief Hopper guy was also in there. Billy dropped the cardboard to the ground. Joyce placed the wound up rope to the side, picked out a rather large piece of cardboard, and held it over a section of the wall. "Here. Get the tape." He did and they taped up the piece of cardboard together. Once they were done, Joyce turned to him and pointed at the cigarette in his mouth. "Cigarette." She held her hand out to him expectedly. Billy half-chuckled. Well, he had said if she asked him to stop smoking he would. He took it from his lips and placed it in her outstretched hand. He expected her to put it out. He did not expect her to take a drag from it before stomping it out. "Thanks, I needed that."

With that, Joyce left the shed with Billy staring after her. He liked her. Not "like" as in, ooh, she's pretty and he hoped they hooked up. But "like" as in, in...

"She's cool," Billy muttered to himself, his thoughts manifesting out loud.

Hopper walked up beside him and nodded. "Yeah. She is." Then without waiting for a response, he handed him some of the cardboard he had just brought in and the duct tape. "Go back inside and give that to Max. She'll need it for the chairs."

Billy sighed, annoyed. He really wished that they had a better system on determining what supplies went where so he wasn't constantly walking back and forth from the house to the shed like some mindless idiot. But of course he didn't say any of this to Hopper. The guy already seemed low on patience for him, for Harrington, and quite honestly, for the whole situation in general. He slightly nodded and went to the house, leaving the shed *again*.

Just as he was going to open the door leading to the kitchen he heard one of the kids talking and it made him pause. "Just because you know the truth does not mean you're part of the Party. You know that, right?" That was the Wheeler boy. He didn't like that kid's attitude.

Max then quietly said, "Yeah, I know...I mean, why would you want a stupid Zoomer in your Party anyways?" Billy rolled his eyes.

*Zoomer is not even a part of the game. Zoomer? God, that just sounds so made up.*

"I'm just saying," Max continued, "El...sounds really cool."

El.

Eleven.

The girl who apparently could flip over vans with her mind. "Cool" was an understatement if that was true. The Wheeler boy now quietly answered, "Yeah. She was...before that thing came and took her. Just like it took Bob." And then without waiting for Max's response,

Wheeler stood up and left. He pushed open the kitchen door and passed Billy without giving him as so much as a glance. He looked determined and a bit irritated. Irritated from having to talk to Max? He understood the feeling but he had been under the impression that all of these dumbass kids were her friends now or something like that. But this boy didn't seem to like her at all.

He almost wanted to go up to Wheeler and see if his suspicions were true. If they were true, there was the question about what to do about it. He could either be the protective big brother that his dad forced him to be or he could talk with this kid and maybe spend however long he was trapped here bashing Max. It wasn't a bad way to spend the rest of the evening.

But he shook his head to himself. The Police Chief sent him back into the house to give the supplies to Max and the last thing he wanted to do was to tick that guy off for any reason. Billy walked through the door and asked, "You almost done with that?"

Max spun her head so fast some of her long red locks flew into her face. She looked ticked off. "It'd go a lot faster if you got your ass down here and helped me."

Billy held his hands up in mock surrender and set the supplies next to her. "Just asking a simple question." Max glared at him and then focused on the chairs. She was aggressively taping the cardboard onto them.

Yeah. Okay. She was ticked.

The question was, at him or at Wheeler?

Only one way to find out. "You good? That Wheeler boy giving you trouble?"

She let out a deep huffy breath. "Don't be nice to me. Okay? It always makes my skin crawl."

"Well, fine then," he snapped. He started to turn to leave but then he paused. He *had* to watch out for her and clearly she was upset. He let out an annoyed sighed and turned back around. "You're family and I

have to watch out for you."

Max shook her head and let the sarcasm drip over her words. "Again, what would I ever do without you?" She then looked up at him and met his eyes. "I can handle myself and my friends got my back so I don't need some violence prone, obnoxious, racist dickhead watching out for me."

Oh, how he just wanted to smack her sassy, disrespectful face. But that probably wasn't the...*wait...* "Hang on...Racist? What do you mean racist? What are you talking about?"

She narrowed her eyes at him and then began to repeat what he had said a few days before. "'I'm older then you and something you learn in life is that there is a certain type of people you stay away from. And that kid is one of them.'" Remember?"

*She thinks that I'm...for the love of God.*

Billy shook his head, remembering that day. Max and Sinclair had been talking, obviously in some sort of argument, which resulted in Max leaving Sinclair in a huff. She had been upset and while he hated it, it was his job to make sure she wasn't upset. His dad had made it crystal clear from day one of Susan and Max being in the picture that he had to look out for Max. And that's what he had been doing. "You were clearly pissed off. And...And I meant stay away from people who hurt you, not... I didn't mean stay away from Sinclair because he's...I'm not racist, okay?"

Max's expression changed to a sort of surprise. And as she eyed him as the seconds ticked by, it was clear that she believed him and that she knew she had been mistaken. "*Oh...*" That's all she said after a while. Then she cleared her throat and swallowed down the surprise. She stood up, picked up one of the finished chairs, and met his gaze again, back to looking sassy. "Stay away from people who hurt me, huh? Then I guess I'll stay away from you. You're still a violence prone, obnoxious dickhead."

She pushed past him and stormed towards the door. She almost plowed over Harrington, who was on the other side of the door. And Billy had to wonder, how long had he been standing there

eavesdropping? Harrington got out of her way and then stepped into the kitchen. He looked like he something on his mind.

*God, what now?*

Harrington glanced around the room almost absentmindedly for a few seconds before saying, "Right, well, all hands on deck are needed to finish up the shed so..."

Billy nodded. "Okay. Grab the chair." He pushed past Harrington and went through the door, letting it slam shut behind him. It wasn't too long after that did he hear Harrington behind him.

"Thanks for holding the door for me," he muttered sarcastically.

Billy half turned and saw him carrying the chair, looking annoyed. "Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize that King Steve couldn't pick up a chair and open a door at the same time."

Harrington didn't react.

*We're back to that are we?*

No, Harrington didn't react but he started to say, "Listen, if you're having any troubles and you need to talk-"

Nothing ever good came from being an idiot and letting the truth about his dad slip out. Billy was quick to interrupt. "Thanks, but the last thing I need right now is a jock playing shrink." He wanted to say it like an insult. To say it with a sassy undertone. It sounded flat to his own ears. But Harrington shut up and dropped the matter. At least for now.

...

The shed was completed.

Now came the fun part. Joyce, Wheeler, Byers, and Hopper all took Will into the shed and were going to attempt to question him about how to defeat the Mind Flayer. And of course, they had to make sure nothing happened where Will could figure out where they were. Or else they were all as good as dead.

With those four in the shed with Will that only left Billy, Harrington, the priss, curly hair, Sinclair, and Max to roam around the house. Actually the only one to do any roaming was curly hair Dustin. The kid was like a wind-up toy that didn't stop pacing around. Max and Sinclair sat quietly together in the hallway. Nancy was leaning up against the kitchen wall, staring at the shed that was visible through the adjacent window.

Billy sat himself down on the couch that had been pushed up against the wall so all of the pictures of vines could be laid out on the floor. He didn't have anything to do but wait. And God, was waiting for something to happen the worst thing in the world. And he could really use a cigarette about now.

He watched Harrington practice swinging his nail bat around. Clearly, he was preparing for the worse. He twirled it around and swung the bat and then he twirled it around again and he almost dropped it. Billy rolled his eyes. Why did people think Harrington was this great jock again? As the seconds continued to tick by at a ridiculously slow rate, Harrington almost dropped the damn thing four times. Then Billy couldn't take it anymore. He pushed himself off of the couch and said, "Alright, give me that."

Harrington looked surprised and then almost apprehensive that someone was trying to take away his bat. "What? Why?"

"Because clearly I'm the best one to use it."

Harrington scoffed, "So you kill one dog and that makes you an expert at handling a nail bat?"

"Kill one *Demo-dog!*" Dustin corrected from where he was in the kitchen.

The two teen boys both ignored him. "'Handling a nail bat?'" Billy repeated, not sounding impressed. "It's a bat. You swing it. End of story."

Harrington ran a hand through his hair. "Look, there was an axe in the shed. I'm sure it's among the pile of stuff we took out. Just take the axe."

"I don't want the axe, I want the bat."

"I didn't ask what you wanted, I said take the axe."

"What's so important about your precious little nail bat?"

"First of all, it's mine and-"

Curly hair came strolling into the room and interrupted Harrington.

"Second of all, it's technically Jonathan's because he made it."

"Third of all," Sinclair added from the hall, "it originally was Nancy's bat. So, *technically* it belongs to her."

Dustin and Harrington both looked like they were on the verge of going into a full on debate about who "technically" got to call ownership rights on the damn nail bat. Thankfully the priss came into the room and glared at all of them, putting a stop to that before it even could begin. "Okay. Stop. None of this is important, so just *stop*."

Everyone dropped the matter and after a few seconds of silence Billy jabbed Harrington in the ribs with his elbow like he had earlier. Harrington gave him an annoyed, questioning look. Billy told him, "You always get us into trouble."

Harrington faced him head-on and just glared at him. "Are you serious?"

The kitchen door suddenly swung open, banging against the wall, causing everyone in the house to jump. Hopper came rushing in, followed by Joyce, Wheeler, and Byers. Hopper had a sort of determined look about him as he grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil. He started jotting down something as everyone surrounded the cop around the kitchen table. He was writing out dots and dashes.

"What's that?" Harrington asked.

Literally everyone at the same time said, "Morse code." Harrington just looked confused. God, how did this guy survive the academic side of school? He seemed to know nothing.

With the dots and dashes written out, Hopper wrote out the letters

they represented underneath them. "H-E...R-E...Here." Hopper glanced at Joyce with a hopeful gleam in his eye. "Will's still in there."

No sooner had the four rushed into the house, they all rushed back out, but they had a new plan. Joyce, Wheeler, and Byers would continue trying to talk with Will, who would hopefully give them more messages through Morse code. Hopper would relay the message to Dustin with a walkie-talkie. He would write it out, Max and Sinclair would look at the Morse code chart, that just so happened to be in Will's room, and figure out what the letter was, and Nancy would write down the letter. That left Billy and Harrington to stand idly by doing absolutely nothing.

Again it felt like the seconds were taking hours to pass but finally Nancy raised up the extra piece of cardboard she had written on for the others to see. Written in all caps with a red crayon was the message: *CLOSE GATE*.

*Close gate? What gate? What the hell was the kid-wait...The opening to this alternate dimension was called the gate, right?*

Just as Billy was putting the pieces together in his head, he could see that the others were as well.

And then the phone rang.

Everyone jumped out of their skin at the sudden shrill sound.

Curly hair ran to the phone, muttering under his breath, "Shit, shit, shit." He took the phone off the receiver and slammed it back down. The room was once again filled with silence. Then two seconds later the phone rang again.

Billy huffed, "Move." He pushed Dustin out of the way, tore the phone from the wall, and hurled it into the hall. Everyone was too concerned with the possibility of Will knowing where he was now to react to Billy probably breaking Joyce's phone.

"Do you think he heard that?" Max asked, a sliver of fear in her voice.

Harrington shook his head. "He can't know where he is. I mean, it's



just a phone. Right?" The last word sounded like he was trying to convince himself that there was nothing to worry about.

Then Hopper, Joyce and company came rushing back in with a knocked out Will. "So much for that theory," Billy muttered. He wished it sounded more sarcastic and less, this will be the last witty comment you'll ever make. Because knowing that more of these freaky ass dogs were coming felt like this was the end.

Will was placed back in his bedroom. Everyone else was stationed in the living room. Max and the three boys were up on the couch looking out the windows. "Get away from the windows!" Hopper barked. The kids jumped away without having to be told twice and got back behind Hopper, who looked to Byers and asked, "Can you use this?" He was referring to the shotgun in his right hand. In his left hand he had some sort of semi-automatic machine gun. Well, at least they had some real weapons this time around.

The teen looked startled at the Chief's question. "What?"

"Can you use it?" Hopper repeated, louder this time.

Byers opened his mouth to try and say something, but Nancy spoke up faster, "I can." Hopper nodded and threw her the gun. She caught it with ease and raised it up, ready to go. Seeing her with a raised shotgun and a fiery determination in her eyes...Billy had to say, he was impressed.

*Not so much of a priss after all.*

Hopper raised his gun up too. Harrington had his bat at the ready. Sinclair had his wrist rocket loaded with a rock, probably. The Wheeler boy had picked up a lamp, but what was that going to do? And that axe Harrington had mentioned? Yeah, Joyce had it, looking about ready to go all crazy *The Shining* on the dogs who were threatening her family and her friends.

Byers was standing behind his mother, twitching in nervous anxiety. Max and Dustin were close to Sinclair looking just as anxious. And Billy was standing behind Harrington hating the fact that he had no weapon to defend himself.

Soon he was hating the fact that he hadn't dragged Max home earlier, because the distant sounds of howling suddenly came within ear shot. And not just one howl, multiple howls.

With the thought of Max, Billy grabbed her by the shoulder and dragged her backwards until she was behind him. Pointless as it was now, he still had to protect her. For once, she didn't seem to have any problems with it.

The howls grew closer and closer and then they were surrounding the house. It was obvious that that was what they were doing. They sounded too close and there the growing growling noise that was also far too close.

Everyone was on edge and no one even so much as breathed.

There was a loud bang, like one of the dogs had hit one of the outside walls. Everyone turned to the kitchen. Then there was another bang, directly behind the living room window. Everyone spun back to the window.

This was hell. You know what, no. This was *worse* than hell.

The tension from waiting for one's own death sucked.

Growls and other terrifying sounds kept encircling them, just waiting for the right moment to kill. And then...something happened. A few dogs seemed to make some sort of whimpering noise and then there was nothing.

Not a damn thing.

Then-

The living room window shattered from the impact of a dog flying through it. Oh, God, this was it! But instead of leaping into action and attempting to kill everyone, it lifelessly hit the floor and stayed down.

After the initial shock began to wear away, the group gradually got closer to the dog. "Holy..." Dustin mumbled, sounding amazed.

"Is it dead?" Max asked, still behind Billy. Hopper cautiously walked up to the creature and kicked it with his foot. Considering it didn't spring back to life and try to chew his leg off, they were all pretty sure it was dead. The question was, how?

There wasn't time to think about it though; the main door began to creak. That captured everyone's attentions, even more so when the lock on the door unlocked itself. Hopper got back in the front of the group, gun once again raised. The chain on the door slid off on its own accord and then the door slowly opened.

And a punk little girl came walking in with blood dripping from her nose.